

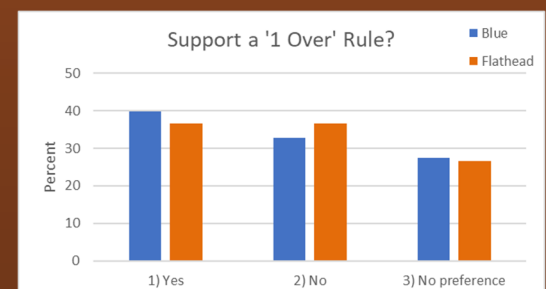
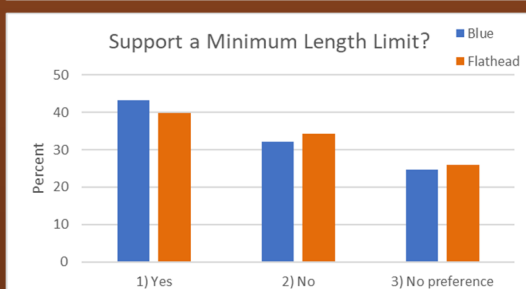
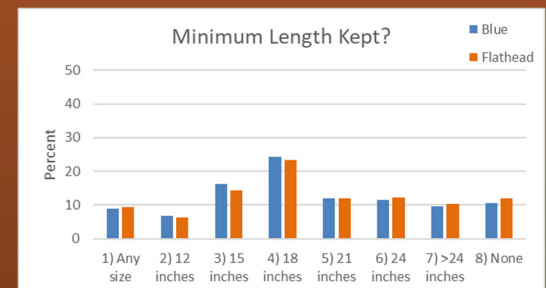
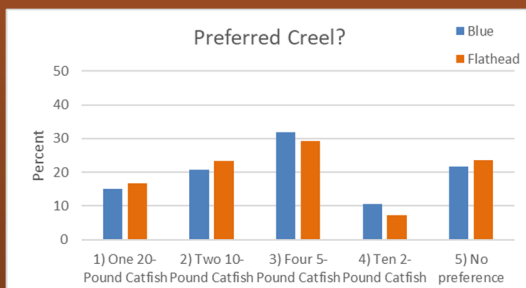
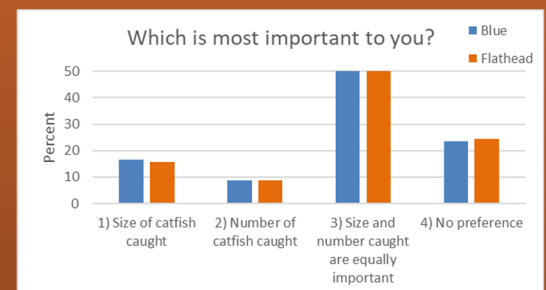
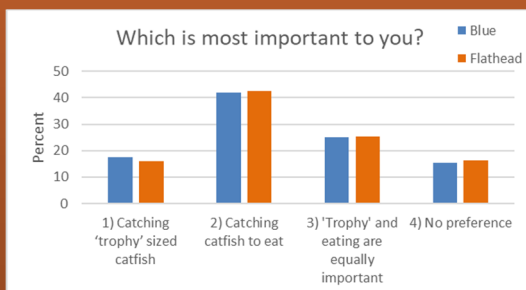
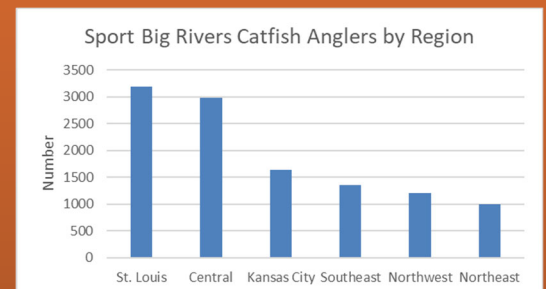
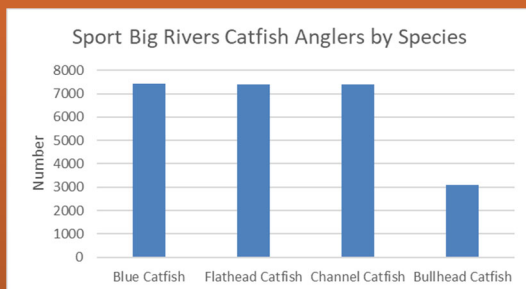
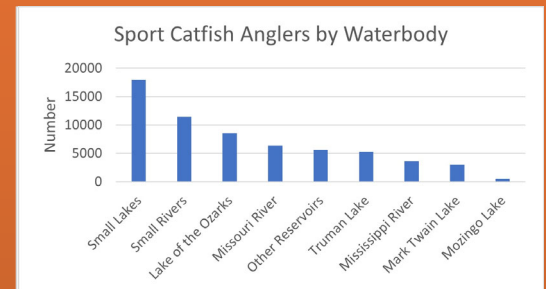
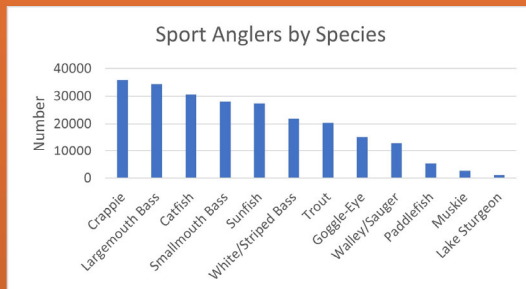


MDC Science Branch

Big Rivers Catfish Angler Preferences

Figures 1-10. Questionnaire responses and preferences of big rivers catfish anglers.

Science Notes



Big Rivers Catfish Angler Preferences

By: Joe McMullen and Kyle Winders, Missouri Department of Conservation

Background: Studies of blue catfish and flathead catfish in the Mississippi and Missouri rivers (big rivers) were prompted by concerns about overharvest of large catfish and inadequate harvest regulations. Opportunities to manage big rivers catfish fisheries to better meet the desires of trophy fishers were identified but regulation changes to prevent overharvest were deemed unnecessary. Therefore, broad public support is needed to justify regulation changes that limit resource use.

Methods: To determine public preferences related to catfish fishing and management an electronic questionnaire was distributed during July 2021. All licensed Missouri residents with an email address on file were invited to complete the questionnaire. Public comments were collected from 7 July to 15 August 2021.

Results (Questionnaire): Email invitations were sent to sport (n = 447,405) and commercial (n = 123) fishing permit holders. Among sport fishing respondents (n = 46,083; 10.3% response rate), 30,613 indicated that they fished for catfish, which ranked third in popularity behind crappie and largemouth bass (Figure 1).

Among sport big rivers catfish anglers, 6,381 fished the Missouri River and 3,625 fished the Mississippi River (Figure 2) and nearly all fished for both blue catfish and flathead catfish (Figure 3). The preferences of sport big rivers catfish anglers and commercial fishers included:

More sport anglers fished St. Louis and Central regions (Figure 4).

Sport anglers and commercial fishers indicated that catching catfish to eat was more important than catching trophy size catfish (Figure 5).

A majority of sport anglers and commercial fishers indicated that the size and number of catfish caught were equally important (Figure 6).

Sport anglers preferred creels of intermediate numbers and weights of catfish (four 5-pound fish) (Figure 7); commercial fishers' preferences varied.

A majority of sport anglers and commercial fishers preferred keeping fish 18" in length or smaller (Figure 8).

Sport angler support for/opposition to a minimum length limit was split (Figure 9); a majority of commercial fishers were opposed.

Sport angler support for/opposition to a 1-over rule (one catfish over 30" may be kept as part of a daily limit) was split (Figure 10).

Table 1. Mean responses from 2002 and 2021 when asked: *What do you consider to be the minimum weight of a trophy?*

Species	Weight (lbs.)	
	2002	2021
Blue Catfish	28.4	40.3
Flathead Catfish	33.5	36.4

Opinions on the minimum weight of trophy size blue catfish and flathead catfish have shifted since 2002 (Table 1).

Results (Public Comment Period): Comments were received from 330 Missouri residents and 73 non-residents. Common themes included:

Strong support for keeping current regulations.

Support for banning transport of live, commercially harvested catfish out-of-state.

Support for a 1-over daily limit.

Support for increased regulation of commercial harvest.

Support for MDC to "do whatever needs to be done".

Support for a minimum length limit.

Management Implications: Fisheries research confirms that current regulations support healthy blue catfish and flathead catfish populations and maintain sustainable fisheries on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Public input indicates that catching catfish to eat is more important than catching trophy size catfish and that many fishers prefer to keep smaller catfish. While some anglers are interested in catching trophy size catfish and implementing more restrictive harvest regulations, that sentiment is not overwhelming and public comments strongly support no change. Therefore, a regulation change was not recommended. However, it will be important to monitor public attitudes and preferences in the future, as they continue to evolve.